

## Harris County Proposed Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)

Submitted to Commissioners Court November 9, 2021

## Why Establish a Harris County Sexual Assault Team?





## Background

#### 2019

- An estimated 139,815 rapes were reported to law enforcement (UCR)
- There were an estimated 459,310 rape/sexual assaults nationwide (NCVS)

#### 2020

- There were and estimated 319,950 rape/sexual assaults (NCVS)
- In Texas, there were 13,327 rapes and 16,969 sexual assaults reported to law enforcement
- There were 2,495 reported rapes in Harris County (which is down 3.5% from 2019)



Harris County Crime Dashboard



## **Under Reporting**

- Sexual assault is considered by many the least reported of crimes
- Only about <u>9-23%</u> of survivors report their victimization to law enforcement
- Many reasons why survivors do not report, including
  - Embarrassment
  - Fear of being blamed
  - Belief that systems will not help or be hurtful
  - Fear of retaliation





## What is a Sexual Assault Response Team?

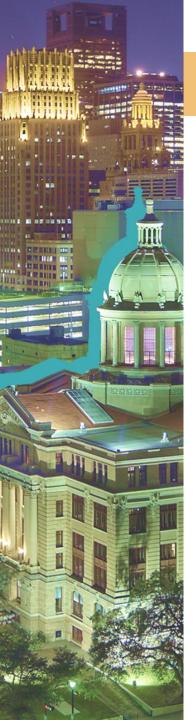
### Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs)

- Developed in the 1970s to improve community response to sexual assault
- Include individuals from different disciplines, community organizations, and criminal justice agencies (e.g., prosecutors, law enforcement)
- Core mission: to prioritize victims' needs and improve community response to sexual assault



## What is SB 476 by Senator Jane Nelson?

- SB 476 mandates the creation of a county based sexual assault response team.
  - Brings together stakeholders with expertise on sexual assault
  - Create a written protocol to establish community processes for the investigation and prosecution of sexual assault
  - Maintain data on sexual assault
    - Number of assaults reported, investigations and prosecutions of these
  - Present written report to Commissioners Court



### Who Serves on the SART?

SB 476 requires that the team consist of:

- 1. Chief Administrator of a Sexual Assault Program that provides services within the County;
- 2. A prosecutor with jurisdiction over adult sexual assault cases in the County;
- 3. The Sheriff of the County, or their designee;
- 4. The Chief of the largest municipal law enforcement agency, if one exists, or their designee;
- 5. A sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, Forensic Examiner that provides exams within the County, or if they do not exist, a representative from the largest healthcare provider in the County;
- 6. A mental or behavioral health provider within the County, or if they do not exist a representative from the public health department; and
- 7. Other persons or professionals the SART considers necessary for the operation of the response team.



- Meet at least quarterly
- Develop a written protocol for responding to adult survivors within the community
- SART must review and amend any response team protocols, forms, or guidelines
- Present report to Commissioners Court no later than December 1 of each odd-numbered year



## Candidates for the Inaugural SART

#### Chief Administrator of sexual assault program

- Emilee Whitehurst, President & CEO of Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)
- Sonia Corrales, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Houston Area Women's Center (HAWC)

# A prosecutor with jurisdiction over adult sexual assault cases in the County

- Johna Stallings (primary), Division Chief of Adult Sex Crimes and Trafficking Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office
- Jamie Burro (back-up), Felony Chief Adult Sex Crimes and Trafficking Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office
- Celeste Byrom (back-up), Division Chief and Director of Victim Services Division, Harris County District Attorney's Office





## Candidates for the Inaugural SART (cont.)

#### The Sheriff of the County, or their designee

- Lieutenant Gale Johnson, Adult Special Crimes Section, Harris County Sheriff's Office
- Sergeant Tommy Smith, Adult Special Crimes Section, Harris County Sheriff's Office
- Deputy Oscar Cisneros, Deputy Investigator, Criminal Investigations Bureau,
  Adult Special Crimes Section, Adult Sex Crimes Unit, Harris County Sheriff's
  Office

# The Chief of the largest municipal law enforcement agency, if one exists, or their designee

- Lieutenant Jacinda J. Gunter, Special Victims Division, Adult Sex Crimes Unit, Houston Police Department
- Commander Hong-Le Conn, Special Victims Division, Houston Police Department
- Commander Harlan Daniel Harris, Victim Services, Houston Police Department



## Candidates for the Inaugural SART (cont.)

A sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, Forensic Examiner that provides exams within the County, or if they do not exist, a representative from the largest healthcare provider in the County

- Dr. Amy Castillo, Chief Operating Officer, Houston Forensic Science Center
- Courtney Head, Manager of Forensic Biology, Houston Forensic Science Center
- Jamie Ferrell, Clinical Director, Memorial Hermann Health System, Forensic Nursing Services
- Dr. Sally Henin, Chief of Medical Operations, Memorial Hermann Health Systems, Forensic Nursing Operations
- Sandra Sanchez, Program Director, Forensic Nursing Harris Health System
- Dr. Khara Breeden, Chief Executive Officer, The Forensic Center of Excellence
- Micala Clark, Legal Counsel, The Forensic Center of Excellence



## Candidates for the Inaugural SART (cont.)

A mental or behavioral health provider within the County, or if they do not exist a representative from the public health department; and

 Wayne Young, Chief Executive Officer, The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD

Other persons or professionals the SART considers necessary for the operation of the response team

- Brenda Sykes, Executive Director, Bay Area Turning Point
- Wykesha Dixon, Program Director at Bay Area Turning Point Inc.
- Olivia Rivers, CEO/Executive Director, The Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Inc.
- Barbie Brashear, MSW Executive Director, Harris County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council
- Monica Gonzales, Senior Litigator, Felony Trial Division, Harris County Public Defender's Office



## Next Steps

- Commissioners Court appoint inaugural members of SART
  - Once approved, a meeting for the SART will be scheduled on or before December 1, 2021 in compliance with SB 476.



## Next Steps (cont.)

- At this first meeting:
  - A presiding officer will be elected
  - Determine the addition of other members who may be necessary for the SARTs operation
  - Discuss collaboration and information sharing with criminal justice systems, local law enforcement agencies, and service providers not already on the SART
  - Future meetings for 2022 (quarterly) will be scheduled
  - Begin work on the organization structure and by-laws
- Written protocol and data collection needs to be completed by December 1, 2022.

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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